

Family Activity Guide

# Ancestors

Art and the Afterlife



Experimental Gallery  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art

# Dear Friends,

We are excited that your child has visited ANCESTORS: ART AND THE AFTERLIFE. Whether he or she came with a school tour or with family or with friends, it is our goal to provide a positive experience using African art and LACMA's Experimental Gallery.

Your family can use this Activity Guide as part of a return visit to the museum or at home. The first few pages of the Guide introduce the subject of ancestors. Here we ask you, as a family, to look at your own ancestors. Then we present each section of the exhibition along with a drawing or writing activity. We suggest that you begin with the introduction, but the sections that follow can be used in any order.

If you visit ANCESTORS with your child, we recommend that you go through the exhibition together. Consider yourself the docent or teacher. Read the labels so that you can answer your child's questions. Encourage your child to explore the exhibition's many interactive and art-making activities. And, on your way out, stop at the area called **It's Your Turn**, so you and your child can record your own family traditions.

We would love to hear from you about your experience. If you have any comments, feel free to e-mail us at [experiment@lacma.org](mailto:experiment@lacma.org) or write to us at:

The Experimental Gallery  
Education Department  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art  
5905 Wilshire Boulevard  
Los Angeles, CA 90036

Enjoy ANCESTORS: ART AND THE AFTERLIFE and this Family Activity Guide.

Sincerely,  
The curators—  
Elisabeth Cameron  
Nancy Thomas  
Liz Caffry

# Dear Kids,

Welcome to ANCESTORS: ART AND THE AFTERLIFE. We have designed this exhibition just for you, and we hope that you enjoy your visit. This Activity Guide is for you to use here in the Experimental Gallery, or you can take it home with you.

Each page explains something that you can see in the exhibition and then gives you something fun to do. You may need to ask your parents or an older friend for help with some of the activities.

Please let us know which activities were your favorites so that we can be sure to create similar activities in the future. And let us know which parts of ANCESTORS you liked and which parts you didn't like. Remember to tell us why!

You can e-mail us at: [experiment@lacma.org](mailto:experiment@lacma.org)

Or write to us at:

The Experimental Gallery  
Education Department  
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Have fun!

The curators—  
Elisabeth Cameron  
Nancy Thomas  
Liz Caffry



## Who Are Ancestors?

The word “ancestor” comes from a Latin word that means “to go before.” Ancestors are the people who came before you. Or, in other words, the people from whom you are “descended.”

Your parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents are your immediate ancestors. But don’t call your mom, dad, uncle, or aunt an ancestor to his or her face! It will make them feel very old because ancestors are usually dead.

Ancestors from long ago—even before your grandparents, great-grandparents, or great-great-grandparents—are the people who define your heritage. For example, people who are Native American, or part Native American, have ancestors who were Native Americans. Other people have Latin American ancestors. Others have ancestors from some part of Asia or from some part of Africa. Many people have ancestors from more than one place. Everyone has a rich cultural background, or heritage.

Many scientists believe that the very first people who lived on earth were from Africa. If this is true, everyone has African ancestors.





## Who Are Your Ancestors?

Do you know the names of some of your ancestors? Do you know where they came from?

Use this family tree to record the names of the people you know and the places where they are from. If you have a stepfamily, feel free to add them to the tree. If you don't know all the names, ask your family members to help you. Or you might look for names in family record books, such as photo albums, family Bibles, or official papers.

If you cannot find your family history, write down what you would like it to be.

# Portraits of Ancestors

Pictures of ancestors are an important way to remember the people who came before us. These pictures are called “portraits.”

People in different areas of the world make different kinds of portraits. Some people make paintings. Others take photographs. In Africa, people usually make portraits of ancestors as sculptures.

In this activity, you will compare an African ancestor sculpture with a picture from your own family.

First, choose an African portrait from ANCESTORS. Remember, Egypt is in Africa, so you can choose an Egyptian sculpture, too!



**Ancestor Figure**

Made by the Kongo peoples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the 20th century

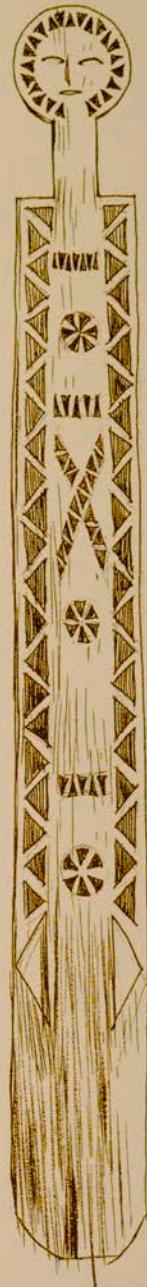
Made of wood, glass, and nails



**Mummy Mask**

Made in Egypt during the 1st century A.D.

Made of linen, gesso, and pigments





**Memorial Sculptures  
(Called Kigango)**  
Made by the Mijikenda  
peoples of Kenya during  
the 20th century  
Made of wood

## Questions

Now look carefully at the African portrait you have chosen. Examine the real sculpture if you are in the gallery or the illustration if you are at home. Try to answer these questions:

What materials do you think the artist used to make the sculpture? How did he or she make it? When did he or she make it?

Who is the sculpture a picture of? Can you tell what this person actually looked like? Would you recognize this person if you saw him or her?

Why do you think the family had the portrait made?



**Pair Statue  
of Senedjem  
and His Son**  
Made in Egypt  
between 1307 and 1196 B.C.  
Made of limestone and pigments

# Your Family Portrait



Ask an adult in your family to help you find a portrait of one of your ancestors. If your family does not have any portraits, choose one on this page and imagine that it is a picture of your ancestors.

If you are using a family photograph, make a photocopy of it. On the bottom of the photocopy, write something about your ancestors. When you come back to see ANCESTORS again, share your family memory by bringing the photocopy and pinning it to the bulletin board in the area called **It's Your Turn.**



## Questions

Answer the same questions that you answered for the African portrait:

What materials do you think the artist used to make the portrait? How did he or she make it? When did he or she make it?

Who is it a picture of? Can you tell what this person actually looked like? Would you recognize this person if you saw him or her?

Why did your family have the portrait made?



Now think about this:

How are the African portrait and the one from your family different? How are they alike? Were they made for the same reasons? Does each portrait look like the person it is a picture of?



# Life in Miniature

When the Chokwe peoples have a problem, they go to a problem-solving specialist. The tool that the specialist uses to identify the cause of the problem is a basket filled with small objects, called a *ngombo*.

Each object represents something in the life of the Chokwe peoples. In a way, the basket holds their entire world! The specialist shakes the basket and calls on the ancestors to control where each object lands. The specialist then looks at the way the objects are arranged after they fall and tells the client who or what has caused the problem and how to solve it.

## Problem-Solving Basket (Called a *Ngombo*)

Made by the Chokwe peoples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo or of Angola during the 20th century

Made of basketry, leopard skin, seedpods, shell, coins, copper wire, wood, beads, string, and a claw



### The God Suku = Protection

Suku protects villages from enemies and individuals from mental illness



### The Couple (*mbate*) = Problems

between men and women



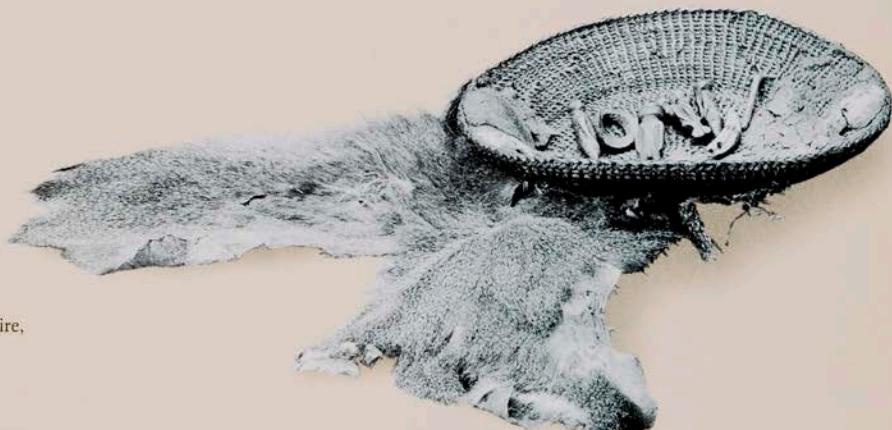
### The Hunting Dog (*muta*) = Hunting;

or protection for pregnant women



### The Moon (*kakweji*) = A short period

of time



# Your Life

What would you use to symbolize your life?

Draw the objects that represent your world inside the basket on this page.

Next to each object, write a short explanation of what the object means to you.



# Honoring Ancestors

Throughout the world, people have different types of relationships with their ancestors.

## In Egypt

In ancient Egypt, the living gave their ancestors gifts of food, drink, and other useful things so that the ancestors would have a better afterlife. The living also hoped that their descendants, the relatives who came after them, would give them gifts after they died.

Offering tables provided a place for the ancient Egyptians to give these gifts. If you look carefully at the offering table, you will see a channel carved into the stone. This channel allowed gifts of liquids to drain into the tomb.

To make sure that the descendants would know what to give, instructions were often left in the tombs. Reading from right to left, the hieroglyphs in the center of this table request:



**Offering Table**

Made in Egypt between 1991 and 1783 B.C.

Made of limestone

|                                     |                            |            |            |                       |                          |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------|------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
|                                     |                            |            |            |                       |                          |
| 1,000 articles of<br>linen clothing | 1,000 jars<br>of alabaster | 1,000 fowl | 1,000 oxen | 1,000 jars<br>of beer | 1,000 loaves<br>of bread |

## In Other Parts of Africa

In modern Africa, the living give offerings to their ancestors in exchange for the ancestors' protection and help. The Fon peoples of the Republic of Benin use these altars, called *asen*, in the same way that the ancient Egyptians used offering tables. Gifts are placed on top of the platform to ensure the happiness and comfort of the ancestor.

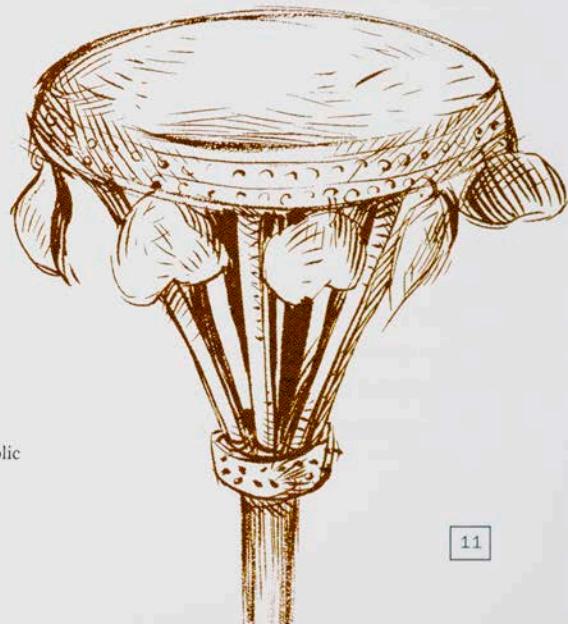
The sculptures on top of the platform remind the living of what the ancestor was like and of what the ancestor did in his or her lifetime. Only the friends and family of the deceased understand what these sculptures refer to.

On top of the empty altar pictured at right, draw a picture of something you have done in your lifetime.



**Altar**

Made by the Fon peoples of the Republic of Benin during the 20th century  
Made of metal, wood, bone, and a bottle cap



# Honoring Ancestors in Southern California

Peoples from around the world honor their ancestors in many different ways:

- Some cultures use altars, much like those from Africa, to provide gifts for ancestors.
- Others use special objects to honor the ancestors.



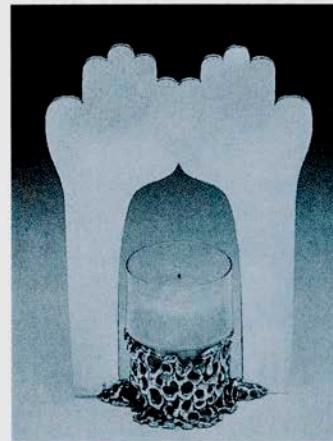
**En Calavera (Calavera Mariachi Musicians)**

Made by Pedro Linares in Mexico in the 1990s

Mixed media

## In Mexico

People of Mexican descent remember their family members who have died through Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos) celebrations. Each year, between October 31 and November 2, the recently deceased are encouraged to return home for this brief celebration. The living show respect for their ancestors by placing offerings—favorite foods, flowers, clothing—on an altar. Portraits of the deceased, in the form of skeletons, are also placed on the altar.



**Memorial Lamp**

Made by Moshe Zabari in New York in 1974

Made of hammered and welded silver and glass

## In Jewish Culture

People of the Jewish faith remember their ancestors on the anniversary of the ancestor's death and during the holiday of Yom Kippur each fall. On these occasions, people say prayers of remembrance, and they often light a special lamp at sunset that is allowed to burn until sunset of the next day. This lamp helps to remind people of their family members who have died.

## In Your Life

What does your family do to remember their ancestors? Do you hold special celebrations?

Do you leave flowers on their graves? Do you have a family scrapbook or photo album?

Do you say special prayers for your ancestors? Do you have objects that belonged to them?

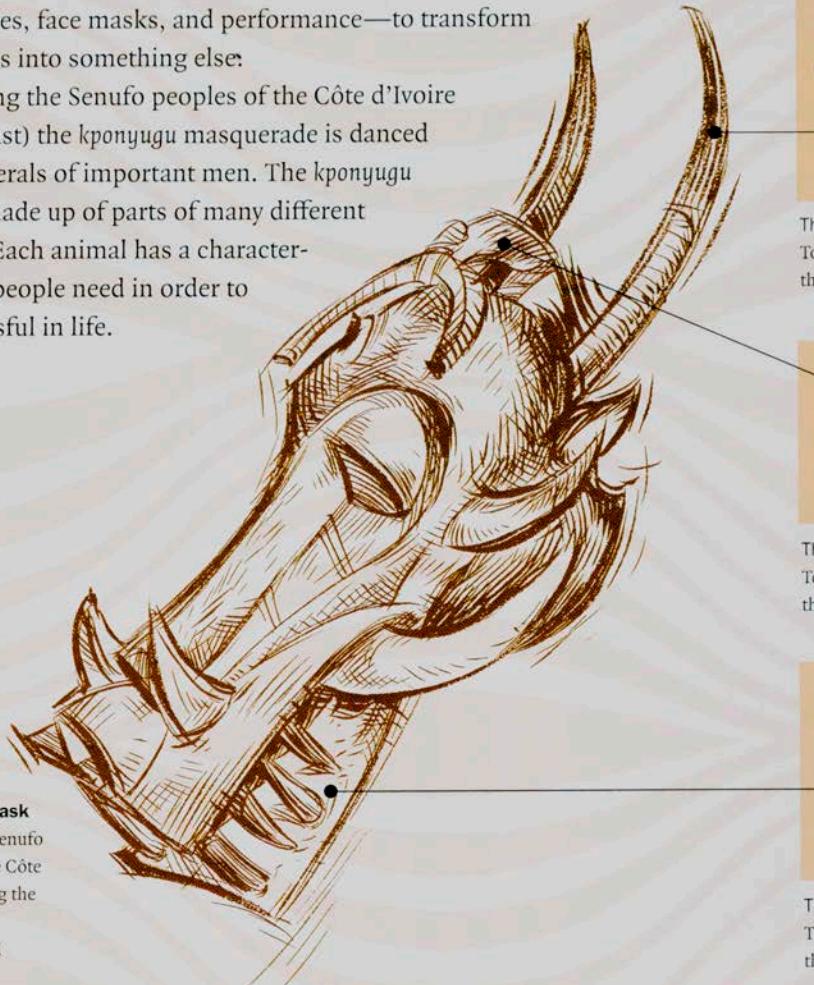
Ask someone in your family about how they remember their ancestors. Write down what they say here:



# Ancestors Brought to Life

Many peoples in Africa use masquerades—a combination of costumes, face masks, and performance—to transform themselves into something else.

Among the Senufo peoples of the Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) the kponyugu masquerade is danced at the funerals of important men. The kponyugu mask is made up of parts of many different animals. Each animal has a characteristic that people need in order to be successful in life.



## Kponyugu Mask

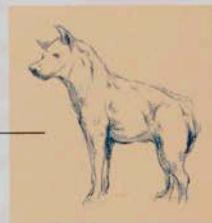
Made by the Senufo peoples of the Côte d'Ivoire during the 20th century  
Made of wood



The antlers of an antelope.  
To the Senufo peoples this means quickness.



The chameleon.  
To the Senufo peoples this means adaptability.



The jaws of a hyena.  
To the Senufo peoples this means strength.

# Create Your Own Animal

Which qualities describe you? Are you funny, brave, kind, or something else?

What animal part would represent each of these qualities?

Some examples:

- A mane could represent a lion. It could show that you are strong and courageous.
- The wings of a bird could represent the ability to fly. They could show that you are adventurous and like to travel.
- The nose of dog could represent the sense of smell. It could mean you are inquisitive or curious.

Now draw a creature made up of different animal parts that represent you!

# You Are the Curator!

Look around the ANCESTORS: ART AND THE AFTERLIFE exhibition. How do you think it was put together? In this section, we invite you to design a mini-exhibition of your own.

Take a look at some of the people who worked on the ANCESTORS exhibition and the jobs that they did.



**Curators:** Elisabeth, Nancy, and Liz  
First, we had to come up with a main idea, or theme, for our exhibition. In this case, the theme was how African peoples use art to communicate with their ancestors. After we picked objects for the exhibition, we wrote the labels and worked with people in different departments in the museum to plan the exhibition and to finish the details.



## Exhibition Designer:

Bernard

I work with the curators to decide where the art is placed in the exhibition. I start by making a floor plan that shows how a large space can be divided into smaller sections, or galleries. I have to make sure that there is room in the galleries for all the objects and for all of the visitors to walk around. Next, I place the objects in the cases where they will look best. I also decide which colors to use on the walls and inside the cases so that the objects will stand out.

## Conservators:

Maureen,  
Sabrina,  
Catherine, John,  
and Marco

We take care of  
the art objects.

Before the objects  
are put in the cases, we fix any of them that  
are broken or have other problems, such as  
flaking, cracking, or loose parts. We also



work with the curators and the exhibition designer to make sure that the art in the exhibition is displayed safely.

### **Graphic Designer:**

Katherine

There are words and illustrations throughout the gallery. Working with the exhibition designer and the curators, I decide what the writing and the illustrations will look like and where they will be put. I design all the printed materials, such as the wall labels, this Family Activity Guide, even the EXIT signs.



### **Technical Services:**

Jeff and crew

We make fasteners to hold the art objects, and then we put the objects in the cases.

Because there are earthquakes in Southern California, we have to make sure that the pieces are securely fastened so that they will

not fall over if the ground starts shaking. We have to balance what looks good with what is safe for the objects.

### **Educators:**

Jane and crew

When you come to an exhibition, we help you to learn what the curators are trying to teach you. We help the curators write the labels. When you look around the exhibition, you will see self-guided tours and other activities that we put together. We also arrange special programs, such as lectures, Family Days, and musical performances. And who do you think was in charge of this Family Activity Guide!



# Your Exhibition

What kind of exhibition would you like to put together?

As the **curator**, choose a main idea, or theme, that you got while reading the Activity Guide. Your idea doesn't have to be about African art. It could be about ancestors in your family.

**Main Idea:**

Think of a title that fits this idea.

**Title:**

Pick two or three objects from ANCESTORS, or from your own home, that you would like to show in your exhibition.

**Objects:**

Write a label that explains the main idea behind the exhibition. Then write labels for each of the objects in your exhibition.

**Labels:**

A graphic designer thinks about how the labels will look. How do you want your letters and words to look? Will you include drawings, maps, or photos on your labels? Where will you put the labels?

Take the words from your labels and create label designs that you would like to see and read.

Now, as the **exhibition designer**, draw a plan of how you would arrange the objects in your exhibition. Think about which colors you would use on the walls and in the cases.

Draw your design. Include your objects.

As the **conservator**, are you sure that the objects will be safe in your exhibition? How would you make sure that the objects are safe?

Write down how you would protect the objects.

As the **educator**, how are you going to make sure that visitors learn about the theme and the objects in your exhibition?

Come up with an activity that will help people learn about these objects.

# For More Information

## Book List

- AARDEMA, VERA. *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears: A West African Tale*. Dial Books for Young Readers, 1984.
- ARKHURST, JOYCE COOPER. *The Adventures of Spider: West African Folktales*. Little, Brown and Co., 1992.
- ARNOTT, KATHLEEN. *African Myths and Legends*. Oxford University Press, 1990.
- FAIRMAN, TONY. *Bury My Bones but Keep My Words: African Tales for Retelling*. Puffin, 1994.
- FISHER, LEONARD. *The Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*. Holiday House, 1997.
- HARRIS, GERALDINE. *Ancient Egypt* (Cultural Atlas for Young People). Facts on File, 1990.
- HART, GEORGE. *Ancient Egypt* (Eyewitness Books). Knopf, 1990.
- . *Ancient Egypt* (Eyewitness Books) Time Life Books, 1995.
- . *Tales from Ancient Egypt*. AMIDEAST Publishing, 1994.
- MAMA, RAOUF. *Why Goats Smell Bad and Other Stories from Benin*. Shoe String Press, 1998.
- MCGRAW, ELOISE. *Mara, Daughter of the Nile*. Viking, 1990.
- MURRAY, JOCELYN. *Africa* (Cultural Atlas for Young People). Facts on File, 1990.
- PACE, MILDRED. *Wrapped for Eternity: The Story of the Egyptian Mummy*. Peter Bedrick Books, 1998.
- PUTNAM, JAMES. *Mummy* (Eyewitness Books). Knopf, 1993.

## Web Sites

that are fun and educational  
(Make sure that an adult looks at these sites first!):

- Africa: One Continent Many Worlds  
<http://www.lam.mus.ca.us/africa/tour.index.htm>
- Africa Online Kids Only  
<http://www.africaonline.com/AfricaOnline/kidsonly/index2.html>
- The Cleveland Museum of Art—Look for Rosetta Stone's Site  
<http://www.clemusart.com>
- Clickable Mummy  
<http://wkweb4.cableinet.co.uk/iwhawkins/egypt/clikmumm.htm>
- The Detroit Institute of the Arts—Look for DIA Ancient Art; and African, Oceanic, and New World Cultures at the DIA  
<http://www.dia.org/index2.html>
- The Dogon Blacksmiths  
<http://anthropologie.unige.ch/inagina/dogon.gb.html>
- Michael C. Carlos Museum at Emory University and the Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester  
<http://www.cc.emory.edu/CARLOS/ODYSSEY>
- Nova  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/pyramid>
- Tomb of the Chihuahua Pharaohs  
<http://members.aol.com/crekkrjack/index.html>
- Virtual Museum  
<http://cti.itc.virginia.edu/~oaage/menu.html>

# Credits

On the cover

## **Mask (Called a Kasangu)**

Made by the Sala Mpasu peoples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the 20th century

Made of wood and cane

Jill and Barry Kitnick

## **Mummy Mask (also on page 4)**

Made in Egypt during the 1st century A.D.

Made of linen, gesso, and pigments

Lent by Yves and Cynthia Courbet, TR 12214

Objects pictured on pages 4–5

## **Ancestor Figure**

Made by the Kongo peoples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the 20th century

Made of wood, glass, and nails

Morton and Geraldine Dimondstein

## **Memorial Sculptures (Called Kigango)**

Made by the Mijikenda peoples of Kenya during the 20th century

Made of wood

Collection of Diane Steinmetz Wolfe and Ernie Wolfe III, courtesy of the Ernie Wolfe Gallery, Los Angeles

## **Pair Statue of Senedjem and His Son**

Made in Egypt between 1307 and 1196 B.C.

Made of limestone and pigments

Lent by the Harer Family Trust

Object pictured on page 8

## **Problem-Solving Basket (Called a Ngombo)**

Made by the Chokwe peoples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo or of Angola during the 20th century

Made of basketry, leopard skin, seedpods, shell, coins, copper wire, wood, beads, string, and a claw

UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, museum purchase, X94.10.1; photograph by Don Cole

Object pictured on page 10

## **Offering Table**

Made in Egypt between 1991 and 1783 B.C.

Made of limestone

Lent by the Harer Family Trust

Object pictured on page 11

## **Altar**

Made by the Fon peoples of the Republic of Benin during the 20th century

Made of metal, wood, bone, and a bottle cap

UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, loaned anonymously, X77.974; photograph by Don Cole

Objects pictured on page 12

## **En Calavera (Calavera Mariachi Musicians)**

Made by Pedro Linares in Mexico in the 1990s

Mixed media

UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History; photograph by Denis Nervig

## **Memorial Lamp**

Made by Moshe Zabari in New York in 1974

Made of hammered and welded silver and glass

Skirball Cultural Center, museum collection, gift of Pnina and Moshe Zabari, in memory of Amikam Dvir, Yigal Japko, and Ya'acov Kamersky, who fell in the Yom Kippur War, October 1973, HUCSM 64.2a/b; photograph by Marvin Rand

Object pictured on page 14

## **Kponyugu Mask**

Made by the Senufo peoples of the Côte d'Ivoire during the 20th century

Made of wood

Lee and Rada Bronson

Object pictured on page 18

## **Ibuku Society Mask**

Made by the Sala Mpasu peoples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the 20th century

Made of raffia, raffia string, plant fiber, basketry, feathers, and sticks

UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph C. Altman, x63.592

Illustrations by Edward Li.

Special thanks to the people who provided photographs of their ancestors.

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